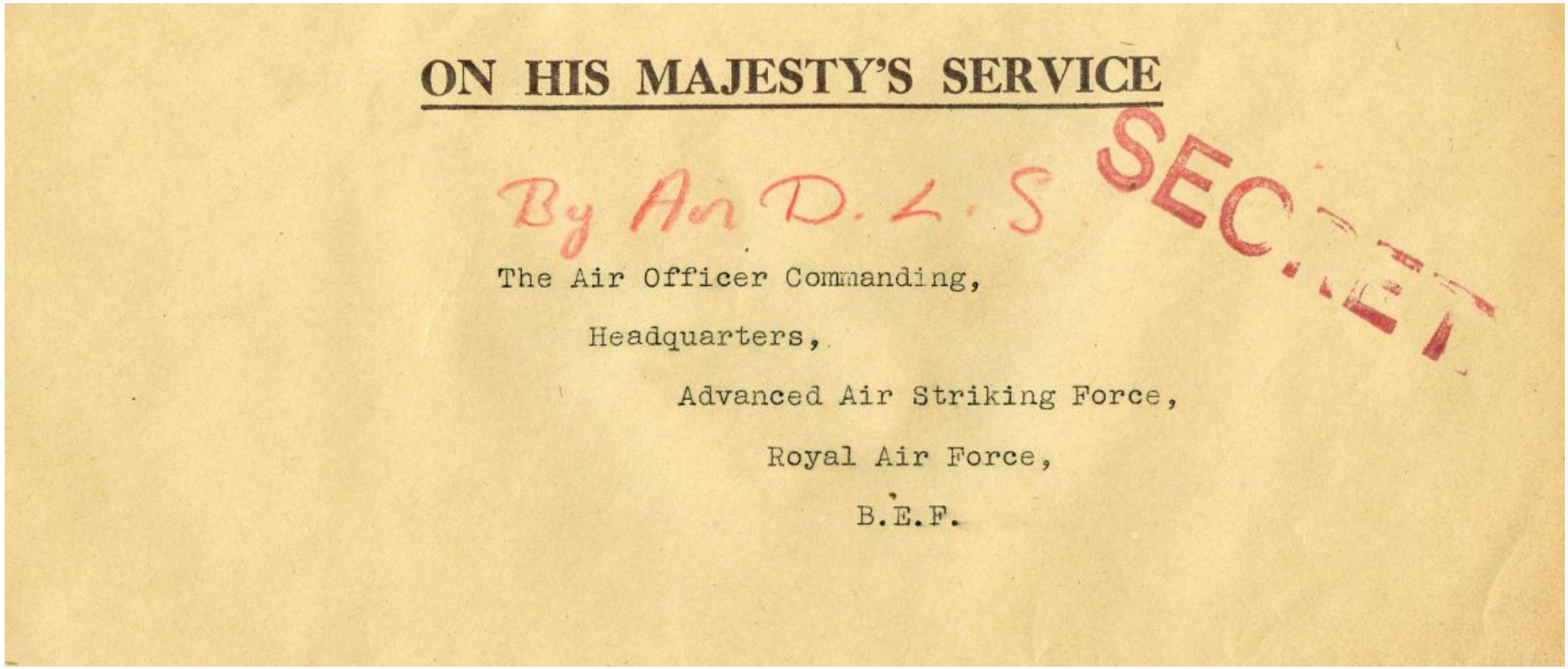
RAF IN FRANCE AND THE UK, SEPTEMBER 1939-MAY 1940



ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

By Air D.L.S.

SECRET

The Air Officer Commanding,

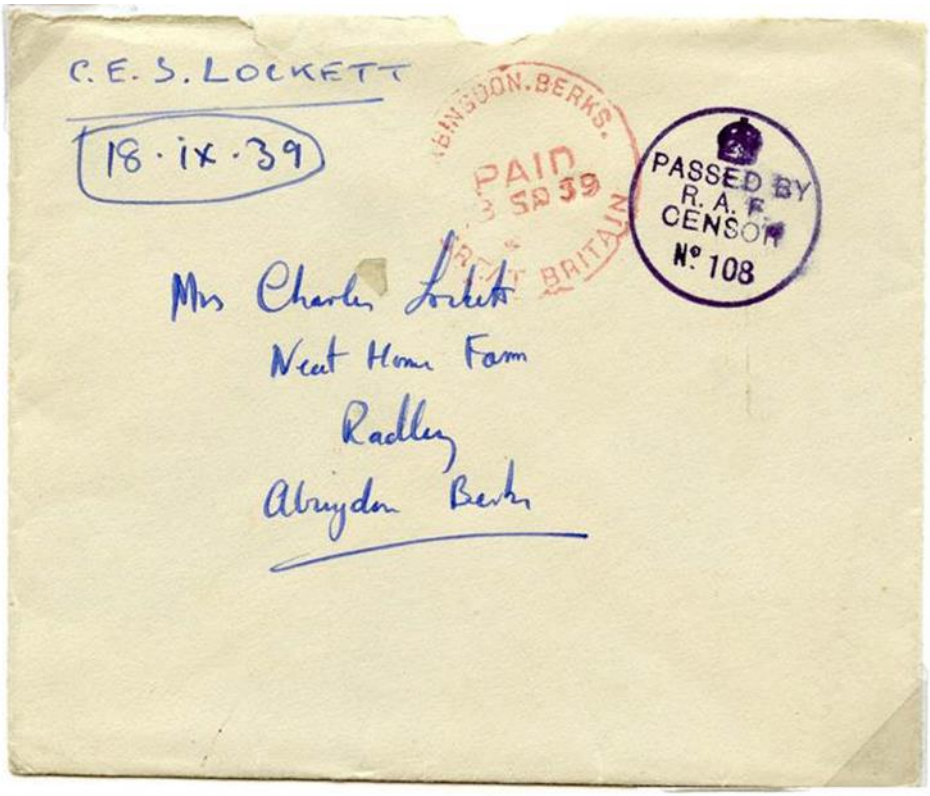
Headquarters,

Advanced Air Striking Force,

Royal Air Force,

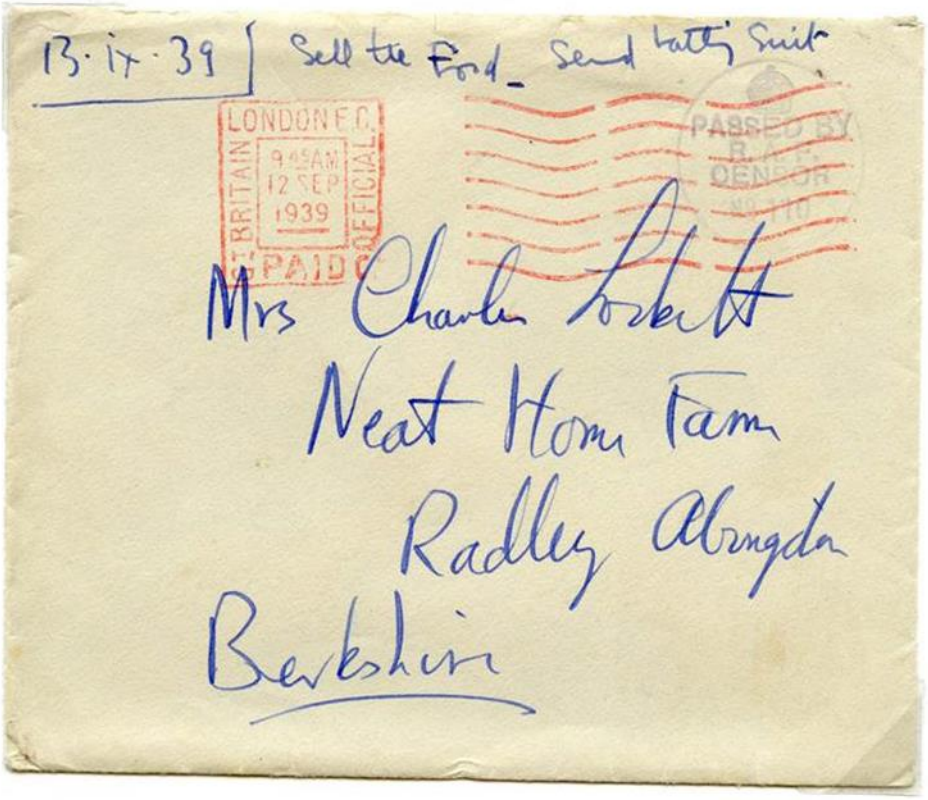
B.E.F.

Official mail – presumably from the UK – to the AOC, AASF, who was Air Vice Marshall P.H.I.Playfair. Interesting m/s endorsement in red crayon: 'By Air D.L.S.' The HQ of the AASF was at Rheims.

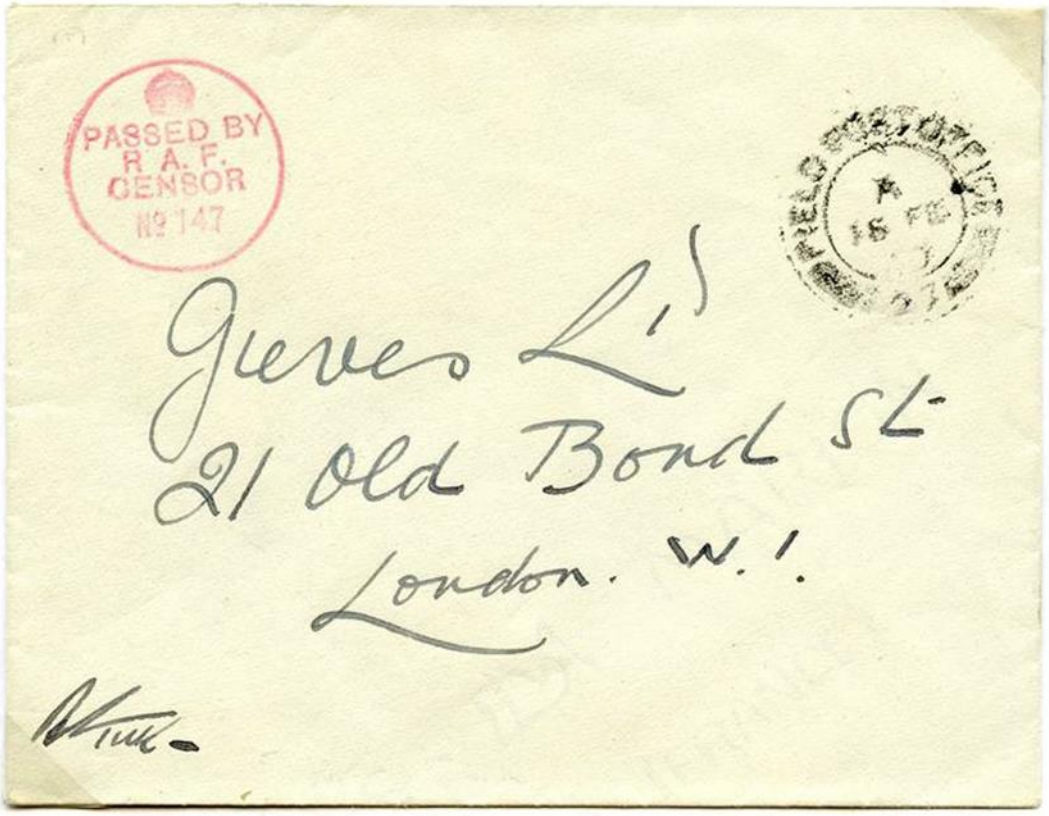


Two items of early RAF mail rom France from the Lockett correspondence in September 1939, apparently before the APS was fully functional and handling mail from the RAF.

Squadron Leader Lockett was of 226 Squadron, which moved to France on September 2nd 1939. The squadron flew the ill-fated Fairey Battle, and he was taken prisoner in May 1940, having been shot down in one of the ill-conceived raids on the advancing German army.

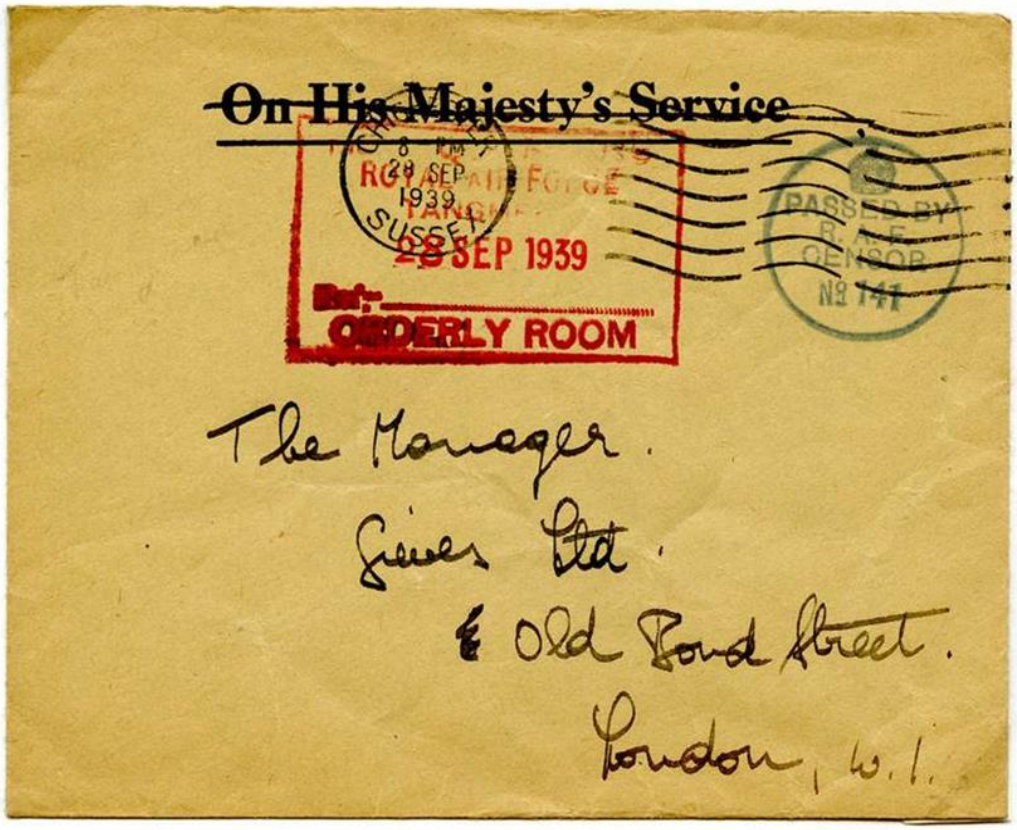


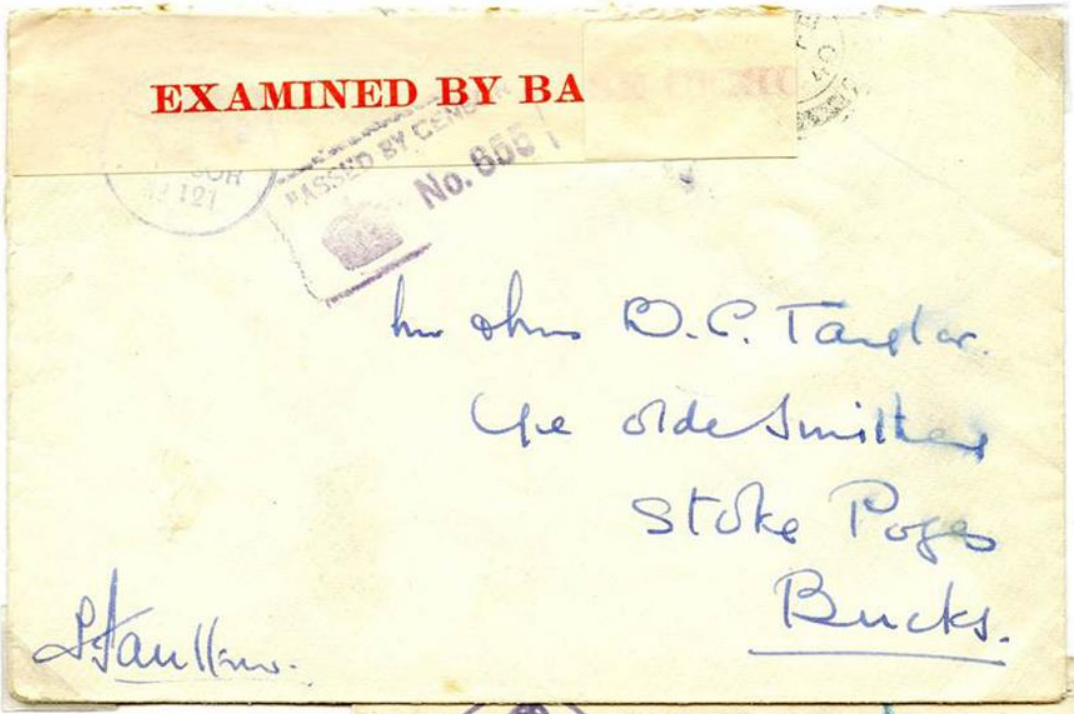
The RAF went to France in September 1939 to support the army in the manner which had evolved in the 1914-18 war. One of the officers to become famous – a personality to evolve in Fighter Command in the next year or two before he became a POW was Robert Stanford-Tuck. He was nominally serving with 65 Squadron (Spitfires) at Northolt in the winter of 1939-40, but this item is clearly from Northern France in February 1940 – posted to Gieves through FPO 27.



A little earlier, in September 1939, before the Army Post Office organised itself to accommodate the RAF, much RAF mail came back to the UK for onward transmission in the normal civilian mail system.

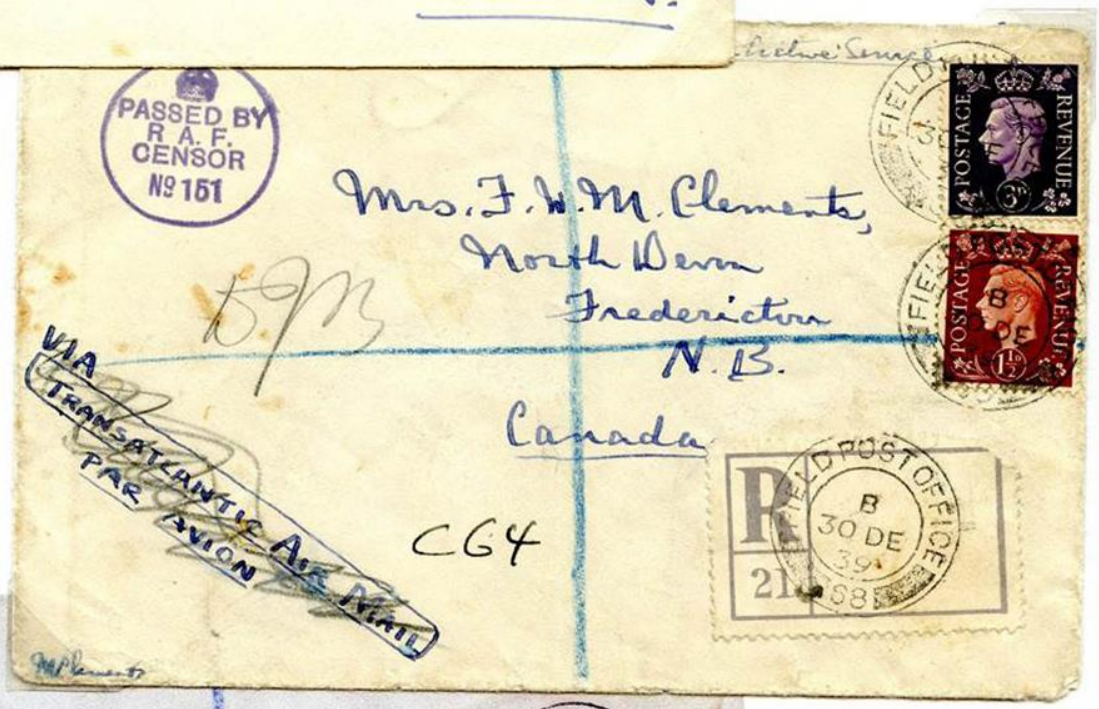
Most of this mail seems to have come back to Abingdon, but this example clearly was flown back to RAF Station Tangmere.

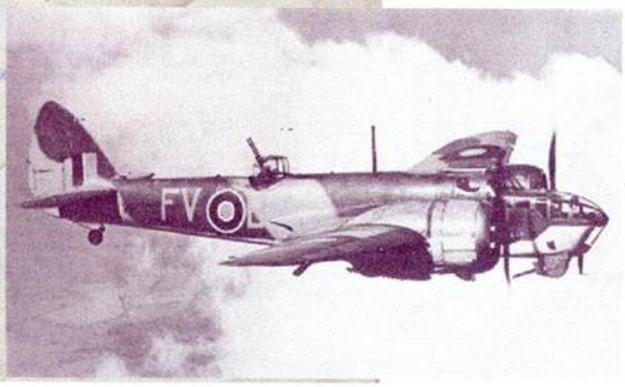




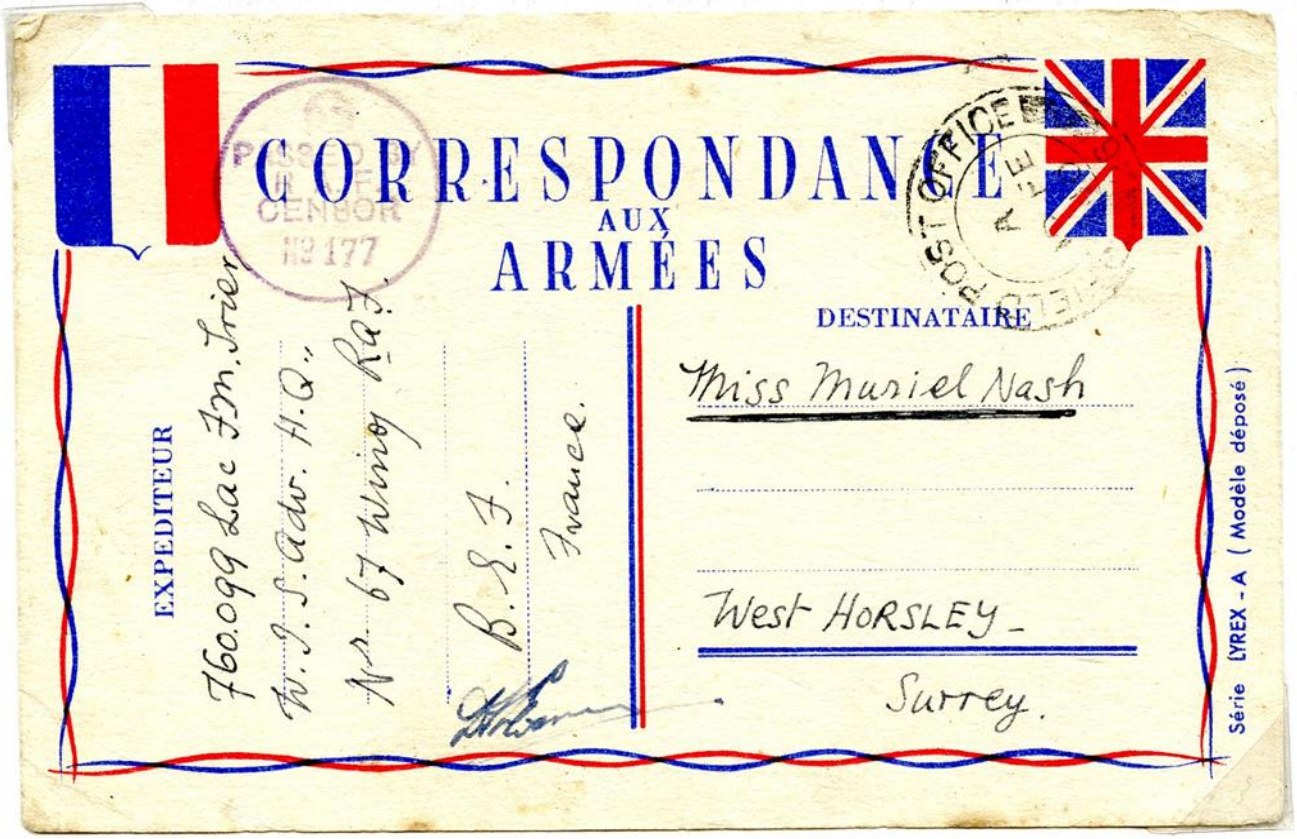
Unusual inter-service double censorship, posted through one of the AFPU FPOs.

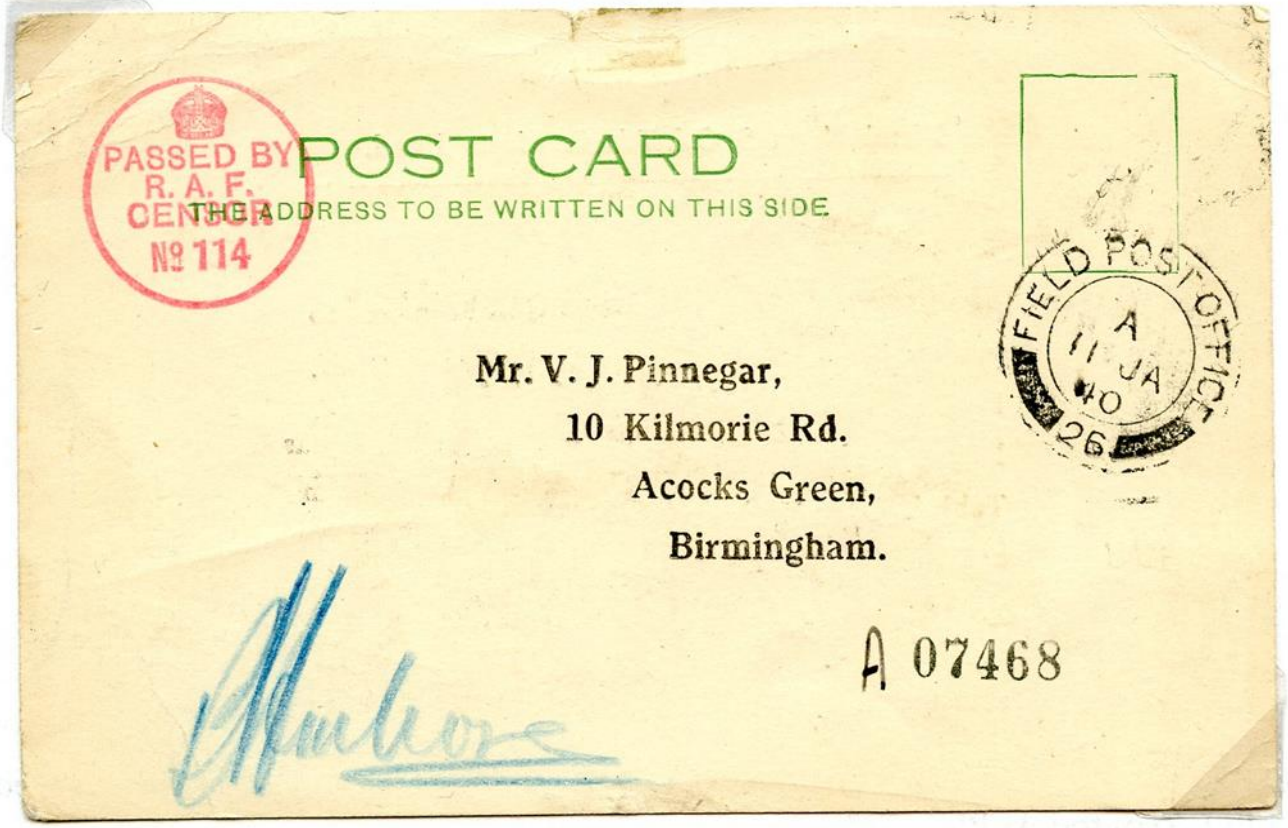
R1/151 of 53 Squadron, flying Blenheim Mk IVs on reconnaissance duties with the BEF. Precise location of FPO 68 not so far recorded.





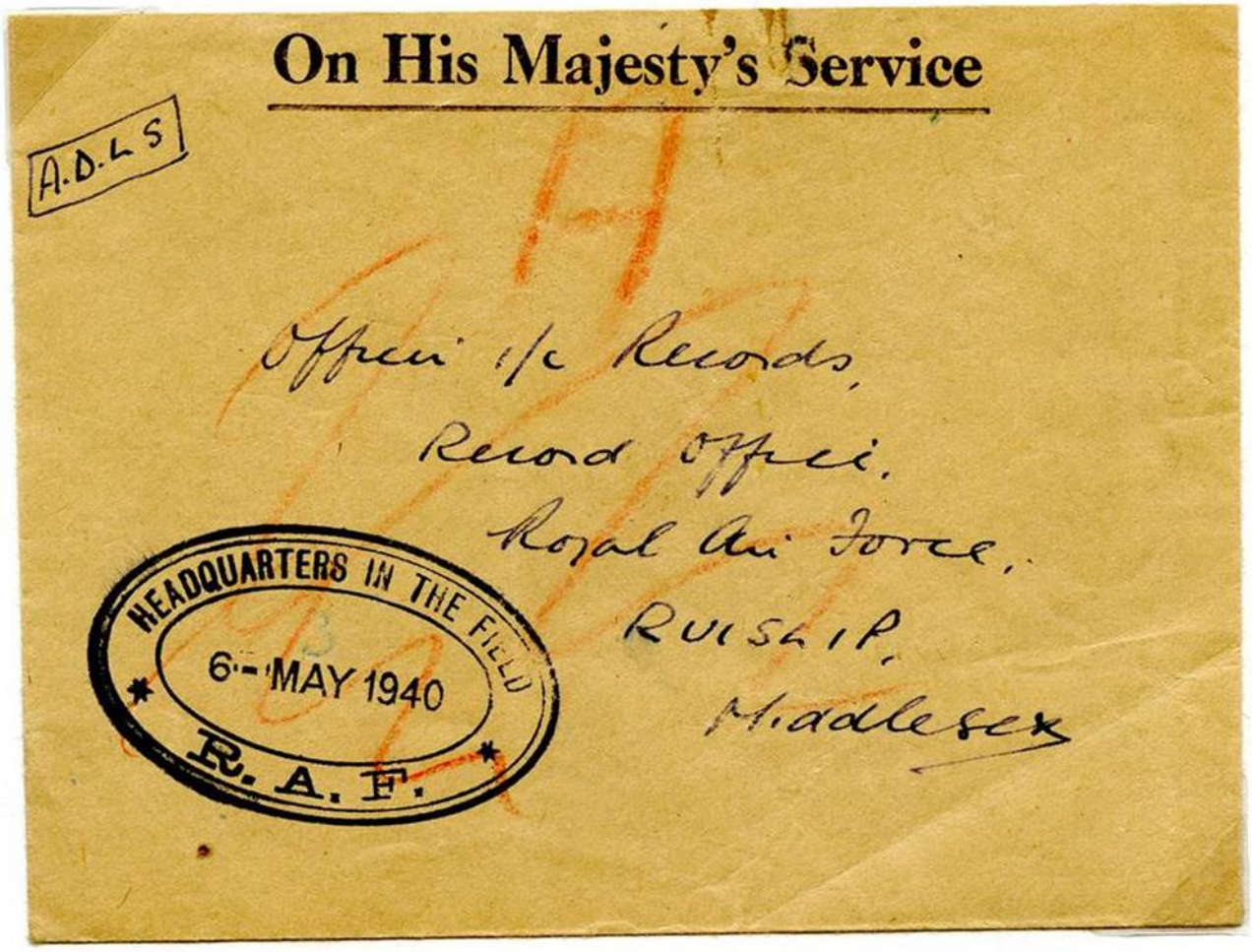
An interesting example of French field service stationery, used by a member of 67 Wing, RAF, in France in February 1940. Posted through FPO 26 on the 18th of that month.





A British comforts fund card being returned to Birmingham with R1/114 censor, posted through FPO 26 of the AFPU.

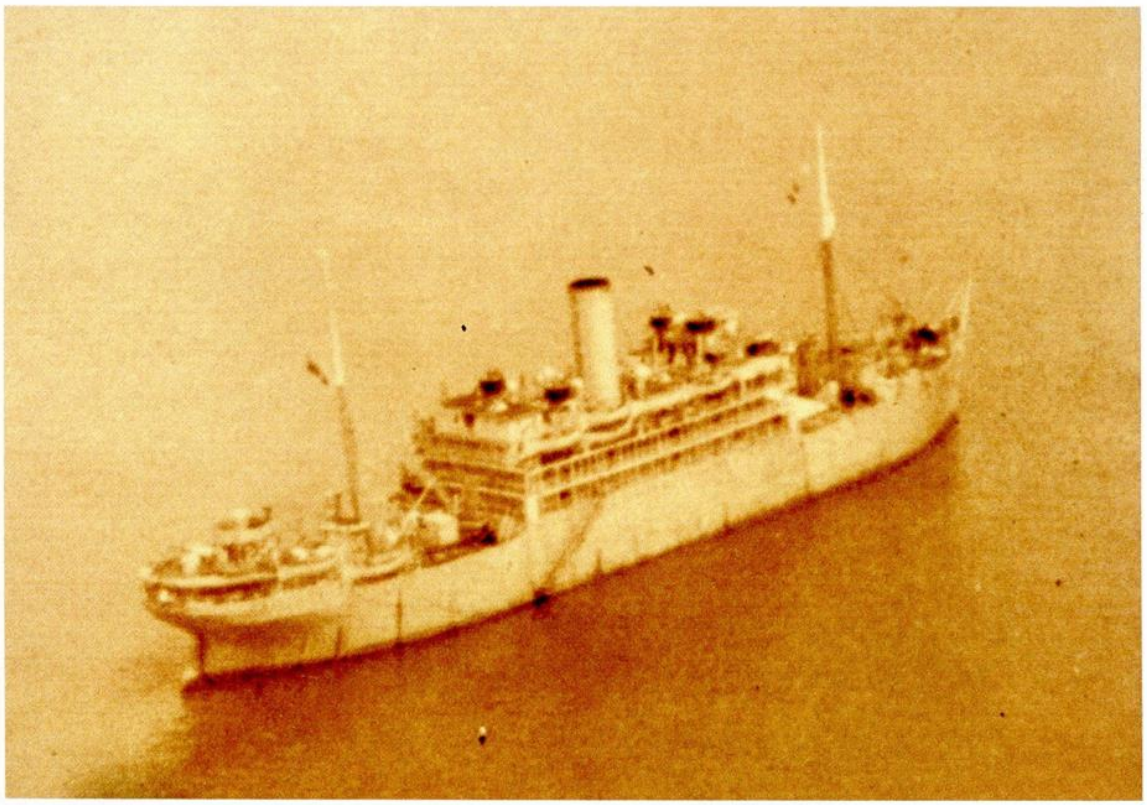
A cover impressed with the R26 unit censor, cancelled at Perpignan. It is thought that this censor was used at an airfield utilised by bomber units of the Advanced Air Striking Force for night flying training.



Flown cover by the ADLS (Air Delivery Letter Service) by Lysander aircraft. This service was provided for official and urgent mails and small packages of supplies.

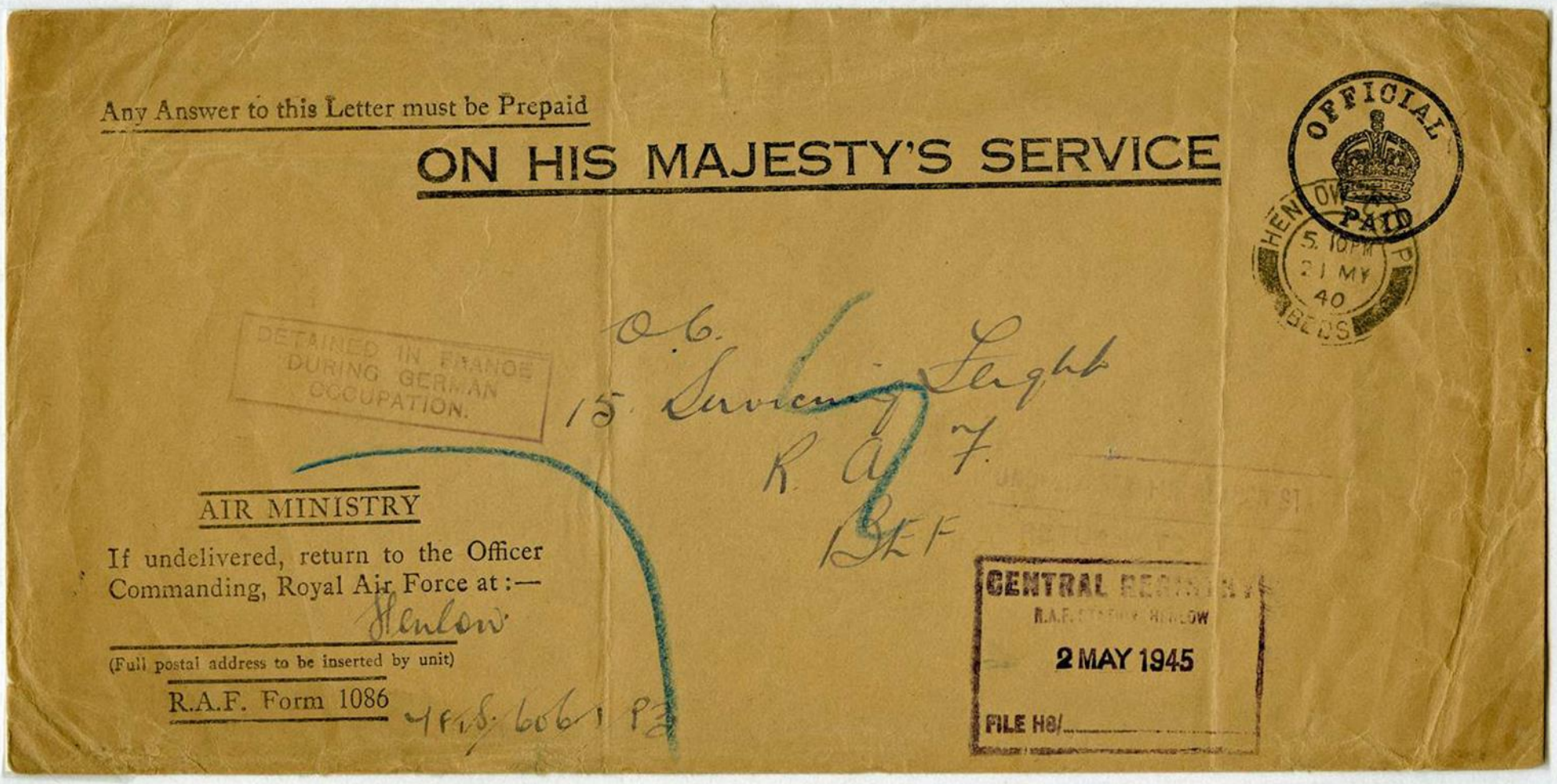
No.100 (General Reconaissance) Wing, Shetland Islands, 1939-1940

The researches of the late Ken Sandford suggests the R37 mark was used on board the SS Manela, seaplane depot ship for 100 Wing, RAF. She was requisitioned in August 1939, arriving at Garth Voe in the Shetlands the same month. When a camp was built ashore, she was no longer required in this role, and left for Lough Foyle in January 1940.



SS Manela. Used as accommodation for RAF personnel 1939-1940 until camp built at Graven.

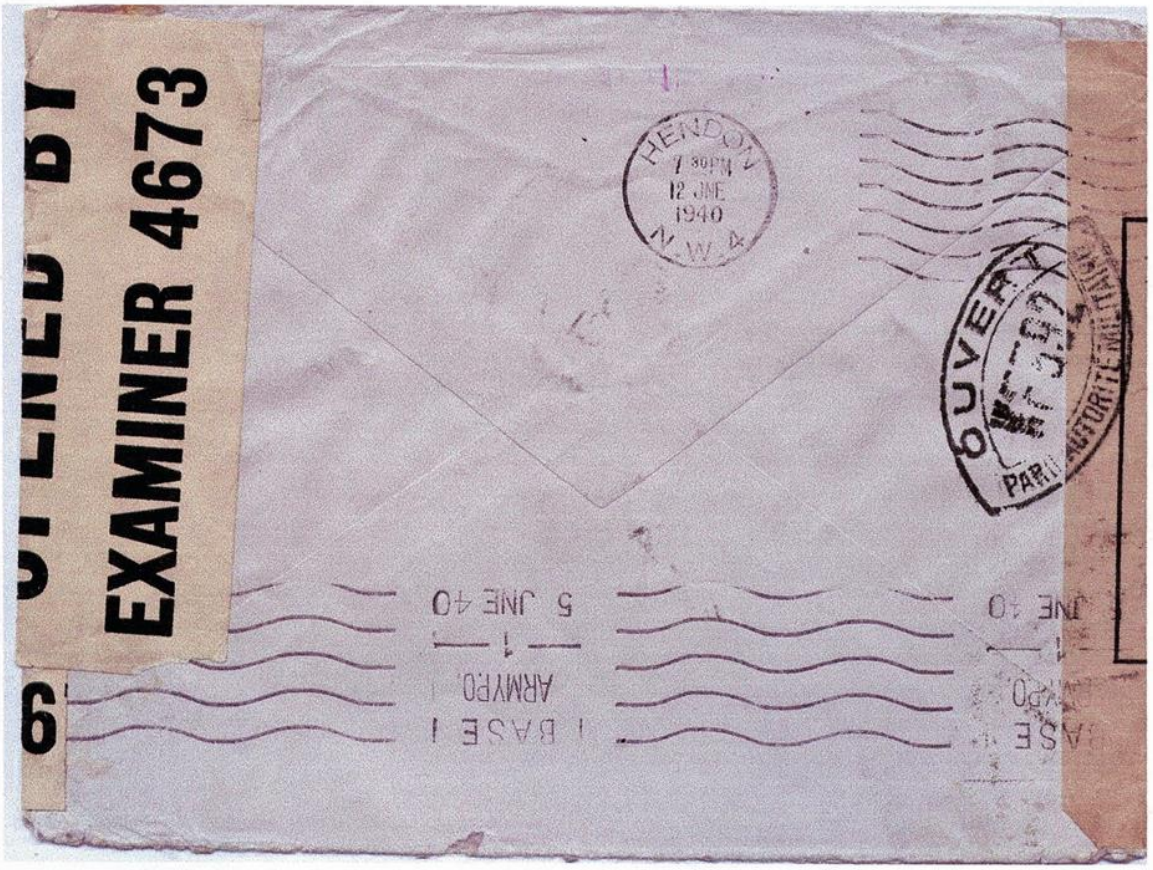
From http://www.northmavine.com/scatsta3.htm



Official mail from RAF Henlow, May 21st 1940, at the height of the German blitzkreig, to 15 Servicing Flight, RAF with the BEF. Not surprisingly, the item was never delivered, being detained in France during the Occupation, and returned to Henlow on May 2nd 1945.

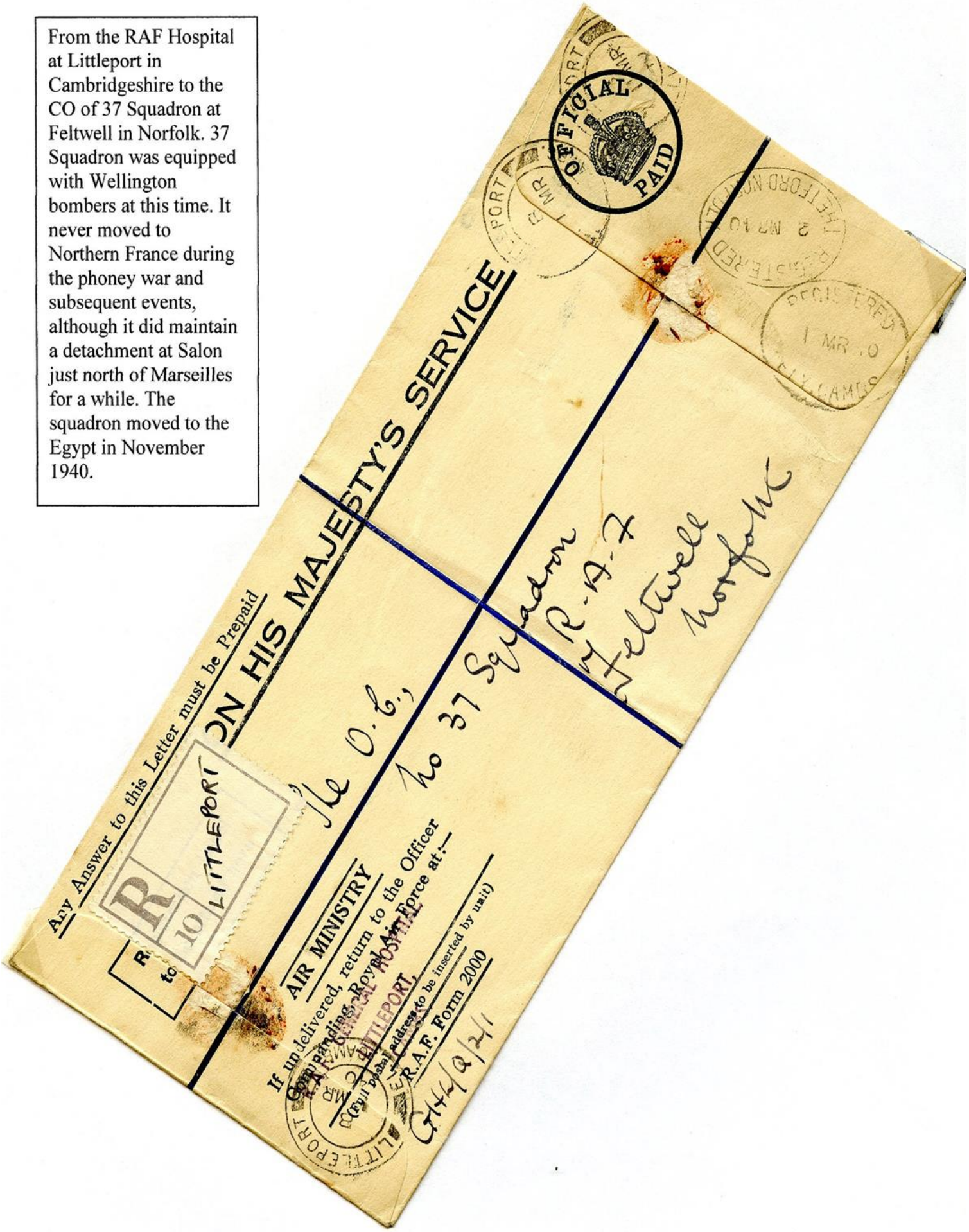
A letter from Lausanne on May 24th 1940, to a RAF officer with what was left of the BEF. Amazingly the APS appear to have successfully forwarded it:

Itinerary:
- Lausanne May 24th 1940
- Censored entering France
- Censored by the British Army
- Re-directed to the UK through:
- Cherbourg (Base APO 1, June 5th)
- Censored in the UK
- Hendon June 12th



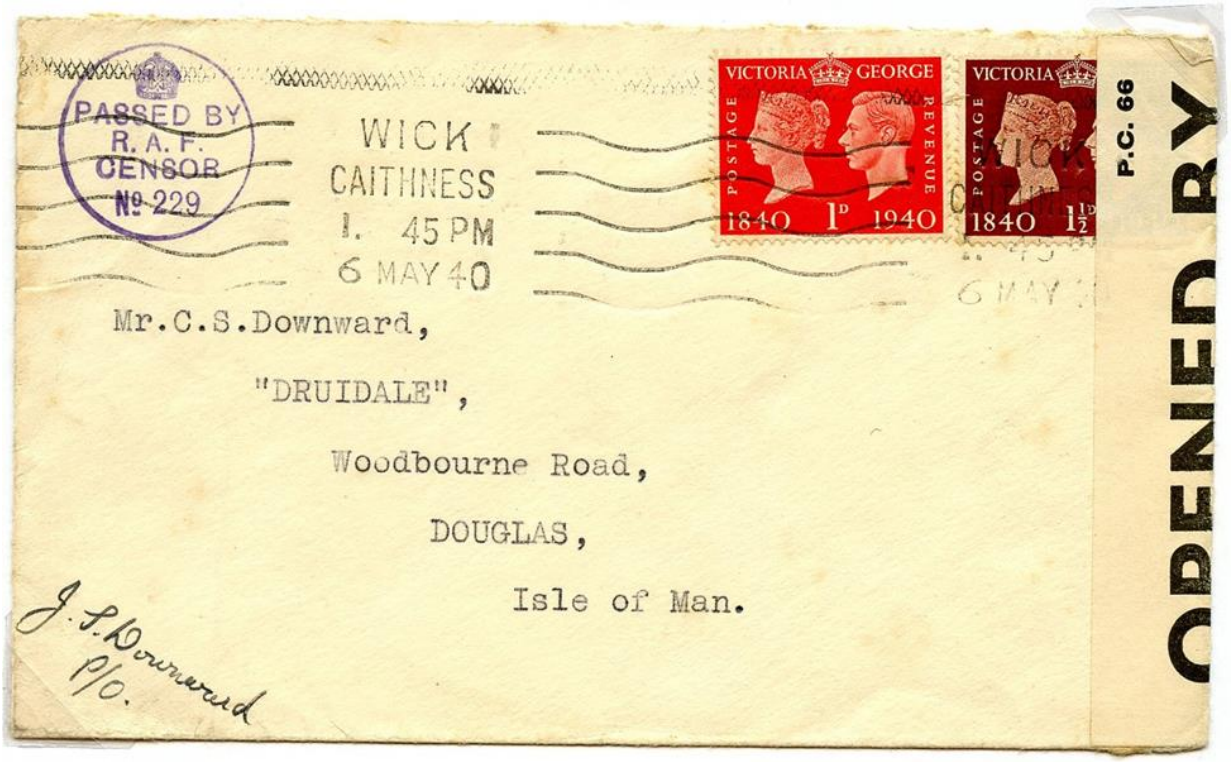
41 Group was part of Maintenance Command. The item was almost certainly flown by service aircraft from Scotland to Hampshire.

From the RAF Hospital at Littleport in Cambridgeshire to the CO of 37 Squadron at Feltwell in Norfolk. 37 Squadron was equipped with Wellington bombers at this time. It never moved to Northern France during the phoney war and subsequent events, although it did maintain a detachment at Salon just north of Marseilles for a while. The squadron moved to the Egypt in November 1940.



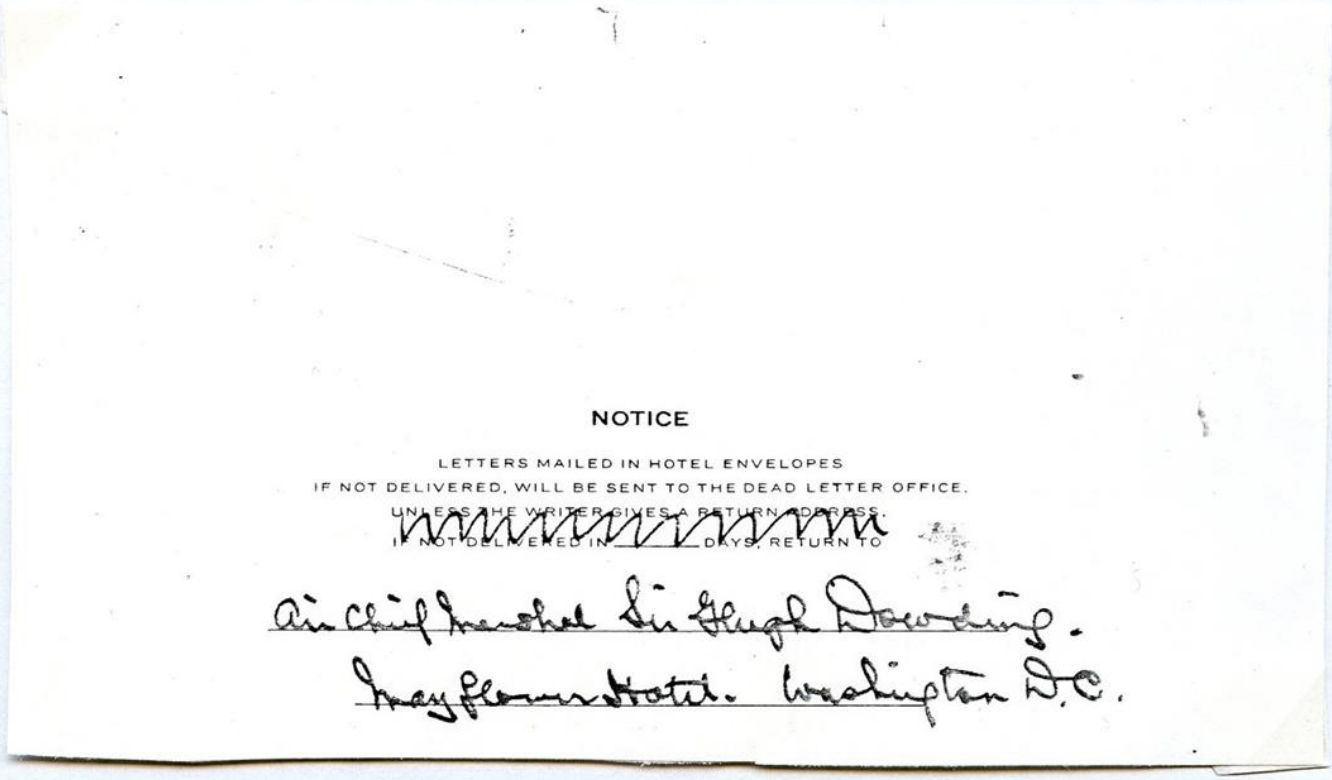
The RAF in Scotland:

RAF mail from northern Scotland was censored between February and May 1940.



Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding, Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command, 1936-1940. It was the organisation HE built which won the Battle of Britain.

Within weeks of the end of the Battle of Britain, and with a new CAS (Air Chief Marshal Portal) in post, Dowding (now aged 58) relinquished his position. He was persuaded by Churchill to head an aircraft purchasing mission to the USA, a role for which he was quite unsuited, and also headed a major RAF economy study before finally retiring in July 1942. (http://www.raf.mod.uk/bob1940/commanders.html)



OPERATION CODE NAME DYNAMO

Battle of France - Unique R.A.F. Message - Found on Dunkirk Beach May 1940.

IMPORTANT

NOTWT

H.Q. R.A.F. STATION, MANSTON
30 MAY 1940
SIGNAL OFFICE

42

MANSTON
CHATHAM NR14 IMPORTANT NOTWT
P T W R GP207

ADDRESSED TO CINC FIGHTER COMMAND FIGHTER GROUPS AND SQUADRONS,
REPEAT BOMBER COMMAND COASTAL COMMAND AND BACK VIOLET
FROM CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF

A549 30/5
THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM LORD GORT
-BEGINS:- ''EXTREMELY GRATEFUL FOR VALUABLE WORK OF RAF PRESENCE
AND ACTION OF FIGHTERS IS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE IN PREVENTING
EMBARKATION BEING INTERRUPTED AND IS HAVING MOST HEARTENING
EFFECT ON TROOPS'' END
VICE ADMIRAL DOVER HAS ALSO SIGNALLED AS FOLLOWS :-
BEGINS'' REPORTS FROM SNO DUNKIRK STATE YOUR
ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN INVALUABLE I AM MOST GRATEFUL FOR YOUR
SPLENDED CO-OPERATION .
IT ALONE HAS GIVEN US A CHANCE OF SUCCESS AND I TRUST YOU
WILL BE ABLE TO KEEP IT UP '' ENDS .
I WISH TO EXPRESS TO YOU MY WARMEST CONGRATUALATIONS ON THE
SUCCESSES ACHIEVED BY ALL UNITS DURING THE CRITICAL PERIOD
OF THE LAST 48 HOURS AND MY PROFOUND APPRECIATION OF
THE EFFORT WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUSTAIN . THE
MESSAGES QUOTED ABOVE WILL SHOW YOU CLEARLY HOW VITAL A FACTOR
EFFECTIVE AIR SUPPORT IS DURING THE CONTINUANCE OF THE PRESENT
OPERATION AND I COUNT ON ALL RANKS TO CONTINUE TO DO
THEIR UTMOST TO HELP THE NAVY AND THE ARMY WHO ARE FIGHTING MOST
GALLANTLY UNDER CONDITIONS OF EXTREME DIFFICULTY =1250+
CANT D+
R 1841 BE VA+ KK

(There is, of course, no evidence to indicate where (or how) this item was acquired/found/liberated.)